

THE IN-CHARGE COMPLEX AND TOBIAN POLITICAL CULTURE

“The politics of a country can only be an extension of its ideas of human relationships.” V.S. Naipaul¹

by Peter Black

Introduction

The people of Tobi (a remote island in the new Republic of Belau) organize their relations with one another around a complex of power and morality which is named by them *Hosuar*. English speakers translate this word as “in charge”.²

The ideas and values which underlie the “in-charge” complex are primarily folk psychological in nature, drawn as they are from Tobian commonsense notions about persons. Understandings about fear, shame, rage, and other emotions--as well as assumptions about the relations between maturity, sexuality, intelligence, and self-control--are all involved in the in-charge complex. That complex, in turn, structures political behavior both within Tobian society and across its boundaries. And, as ever more compelling waves of social, economic, and administrative change break upon their small and intimate society, Tobians consistently construct their responses in terms of the in-charge complex. That complex, then, plays a very important role in the island’s evolving political culture. In this paper I report on this feature of Tobian political process and then, in order to demonstrate the close ties between folk psychology and political culture, I sketch in the network of assumptions, beliefs, and ideas out of which the in-charge complex arises.³ First, though, I need to introduce some essential background.

Tobians

Tobians make their homes in two places: Tobi island itself, tiny, remote, and isolated; and Eang village in Koror, the capital of Belau.⁴ Eang is a small, encapsulated village in which Tobians have lived with people from the other three southwest islands of Belau (Sonsorol, Merir, and Pulo Ana) since shortly after the turn of the century. Speaking dialects of a

common tongue which is closely related to the languages spoken in the outer islands of Yap, sharing many cultural traits, and woven together by ties of marriage and adoption, the Eang villagers form a community which differs in many ways from the surrounding Palauan society. Palauans speak an almost totally unrelated language and possess a sharply dissimilar culture. They also possess numerical, economic, and political supremacy. There are more than fourteen thousand Palauans and only about one-hundred and twenty Eangese, of whom about half are Tobians.

The Eang people earn the cash necessary for their subsistence through wage labor. Historically, that labor has been entirely outside Eang, within Palauan-dominated commercial and governmental enterprises. Such labor is necessary because Eang is not suited for the fish-and-garden subsistence economy which the residents maintain on their home islands. Cash is also necessary for the purchase of the many consumer goods available in Koror but not on the home islands. Additionally, the town of Koror contains many bars and cinemas which the Eang people patronize. These attractions, along with the much more rapid pace of urban life with its many new experiences and people, make of Eang a powerful magnet for the Southwest Islanders.⁵ Its strongest attractions, though, are its hospital and high school, neither of which is found in the Southwest Islands. The reasons people give for coming to Eang from their home islands almost always have to do with their need, or that of one of their close relatives, for access to one of those two institutions.

Life in Eang is not untypical of life in any of the small marginal communities which form part of all the headquarter towns of the old Trust Territory of the Pacific. Most of the labor offered by these communities is unskilled; traditionally in Eang it has meant temporary work as stevedores. A good deal of drinking and minor juvenile delinquency occurs. The social controls which work so well on the home islands do not function well in the towns. During the day many people leave the community to work, attend school, or go to the hospital either for treatment or to visit friends and relatives. Those who stay at home form small groups to work their small gardens, tend babies, listen to the radio, and sleep. In the evening drinking groups form, taxis take others into Koror for entertainment, and there is much visiting back and forth. Very often in Eang, especially on rainy mornings when the place is a sea of mud and hangovers are worsened by the necessity of getting to work, one can hear someone wistfully remark that things are probably much better on Tobi. "I bet they are eating tuna *sashimi* now on Tobi, or maybe even turtle, and we can't even afford to buy canned mackerel." Yet even as they are saying this, Tobians savor the irony of knowing that the chances are good that at

the same moment someone on Tobi is saying, "I really want to drink some cold beer. I bet in Eang right now they are drinking Kirin beer and smoking Winstons, while all that we have are coconuts and twist tobacco." In fact, people have often told me that if they could find a place with both fresh tuna and cold beer they would never leave. As it is, the two poles of their society complement each other nicely. Eang's (relatively) fast pace and consumer goods are matched by Tobi's secure, relaxed atmosphere and plentiful high-prestige foods. Therefore it is not surprising that, except for a small number of permanent residents in Eang, every Tobian spends some time in each place.⁶ At any one time about half of them can be found in Eang and the rest on their home island. People spend varying amounts of time in either place; the longest stay is no more than two years or so. The shortest possible stay in either place is three months, because that is the length of time between visits of the government field-trip ship which runs between Koror and the Southwest Islands and provides the only method of transit between these two centers of Tobian society.

The island of Tobi is one of the most remote and isolated of all the Micronesian islands. Located alone in the extreme southwestern corner of the old Trust Territory, it is a flat, low, well-watered coral island, possessed of a fringing reef but no lagoon. Small in size (only about one-quarter of a square mile in area), its interior swamp has been converted into pit gardens for growing taro. Rich in coconut trees, breadfruit, and papaya and with plentiful marine resources available, the island is capable of supporting many more people than its current resident population of sixty or so.⁷

In the absence of marked climatic seasons, Tobi's years are structured by the semiregular visits of the field-trip ship. Both the pace and nature of daily activities vary considerably depending on the length of time since the last ship. In this manner time flows with a much different, more rhythmic beat than in Eang.

A field-trip cycle begins with the wild spurt of activity which meets the coming of the ship. Loading copra and unloading supplies; attending governmental meetings of various kinds; flocking to the church for religious services with the visiting priest (the entire population forms a single, devout: Roman Catholic congregation which does not have a priest in residence); and, of course, gossiping--all these and other activities occur at a frantic speed during the three or four hours the ship is hove to off the island. Then comes a party in which all the liquor which has come ashore is consumed. It begins on the beach as the ship slowly disappears from sight (not to return for from three to six months) and continues until all the liquor is gone. This can take a week or more. During this time,

newly arrived store goods form most of the foodstuffs and manufactured cigarettes are the only ones smoked. Fresh arrivals and stay-at-homes debrief one another on all the things which have happened on Tobi and in Eang since the last ship, tensions which have built up during the preceding months are dissipated, and changes in personnel due to arrivals and departures are assimilated.

Gradually, people begin to pick up the threads of their ordinary activities. Women once again begin intensive gardening; men again set out in their canoes for the fishing grounds. School begins again and the epidemic of colds and gastrointestinal disorders, which almost always accompanies the ship, passes.

A month or so after the ship's departure a few people (mostly those heavily in debt) begin cutting and drying copra. Gradually more and more people take up this task until, except for necessary subsistence activities, no one is doing much of anything but making copra. In anticipation of the ship's next visit people begin preparing supplies to send to friends and relatives in Koror, and those who are planning on taking the ship to Eang make arrangements for their departure.⁸ Finally the ship appears from over the horizon and the excitement of ship day once more erupts.

The contrast with Eang is marked. There, except for the arrival and departure of individual Tobians, the coming of the ship makes remarkably little impact on daily life. While daily life on Eang is punctuated by the going and coming of people to work, school, and hospital, days are much less neatly internally segmented than on Tobi. On the island, twice-daily church services (at six A.M. and six P.M.), radio conferences with Palau four times a day to transmit weather data (at three and nine, day and night--when the radio and generator are working), and the marching of the island's children to and from school all serve to divide daily time neatly. These differences between Eang and Tobi in the nature and pace of activities are directly related to differences in political processes characteristic of each community.

Political life in both Eang and Tobi is complex, and neither place forms an arena totally isolated from the other. Nevertheless the two communities do form distinctly different political environments, and the main foci of political activity in the two places differ significantly. In Eang the central political issue facing the residents is the achievement and maintenance of access to the economic and service sectors of Palauan society. Such access is both the *raison d'être* and the necessary precondition for Eang's continued existence. This challenge is made severe by the tenuous nature of the title which Eang residents have to their lands.

On Tobi the central issue is the maintenance of ecological and social balance within a very fragile ecosystem. Traditional solutions were religiopolitical in nature, and the challenge to the Tobians over the last fifty years or so has been to retain that feature of their adaptation while integrating externally sponsored religious and political change. Tobians have been much more successful (so far at least) in solving this problem than in regularizing Eang's relations with Palau. On both issues, though, the Tobian response has been very creative and in both instances it has been built around that feature of their sociocultural organization which I call the in-charge complex.

The In-Charge Complex

Tobian society can be viewed as a vast array of linked dyads.⁹ In each of these pairs of persons, one member is superior to the other. Tobians say that the senior person is "in charge" of the other.

The best way to begin to think about in-charge relationships is to consider the relationship of a child and its parents. Parents, for their child's own good, must supervise its behavior. The younger a child, the more closely its activities are monitored--which is to say that the younger the child the less its personal autonomy. Parents are responsible for their child's behavior and they exercise that responsibility directly and often while the child is very young.¹⁰ As the child matures, it gains greater and greater freedom of action. Often parents (conforming to a very widespread pattern in the Pacific) delegate to it responsibility for a younger sibling. This is the beginning of the *transitive* dimension of the in-charge system. A parent is in charge of a child who, in turn, is in charge of a younger child, so the parent is also in charge of the younger child. As the family matures, the children's relationships maintain their hierarchical nature. Elder siblings are in charge of younger. As children reach puberty, gender becomes important in determining hierarchy. Unless there is a gap of two or more years between a girl and her younger brother, he will begin assuming an in-charge stance toward her.¹¹ By the time both parties are adults, no woman is in charge of her brother, no matter what their relative ages.

As people marry, they fall into new in-charge relations. Husbands are always in charge of their wives. Furthermore, should the husband die or the marriage break up, some other man--a brother, an uncle, or a father--will assume that role. A woman does have people junior to her in in-charge relationships--younger sisters, daughters, and daughters' children, for example--but all through her life she will be either directly or in-

directly in the junior role vis-à-vis some man. For a man, the course of life is different. By the time he is in his late thirties (full adulthood comes relatively slowly on Tobi) it is very likely that no one, with one significant exception to be discussed later, will be in a position to interfere in his affairs. No one will be in charge of him. As a fully mature adult male he has a degree of autonomy not enjoyed by any other member of his society. But as adult maturity gives way to old age (signaled by the cessation of certain kinds of fishing and the adoption of a walking stick), his sons or other younger men become in charge of him.

There is much more which can be said about this system of relationships. Among the more important observations is the following: Certain women rich in property and kin are central political figures on Tobi. For them, their junior relationship to the man in charge of them is very much a *pro forma* arrangement. This is an example of a larger generalization which is that the content of the relationship can vary considerably from dyad to dyad. Both the nature of the decisions referred by the junior to the senior person for approval and the actual exercise of the veto vested in the senior person differ markedly from relationship to relationship.¹² To understand why such women continue to observe in-charge formalities (which are felt by them to be onerous), as well as to understand the other features of the in-charge complex described above, it is necessary to consider Tobian ideas of human (or at least Tobian) nature. But before doing that I want to describe the way in which Tobians have drawn on this complex to meet political change.

Tobian Political Innovation

Traditional Tobian culture was the creation of a people whose ancestors had solved the problems of survival on small, vulnerable islands. The challenge to Tobi's first inhabitants was to fit those solutions in detail to their new home, a challenge which they met very successfully. The challenge to each succeeding generation has been to maintain that hard-won balance.¹³ Those solutions, on Tobi as in many other "traditional" societies, were and are codified in "custom" (*mou mou*). Leadership on Tobi consisted of ensuring compliance with custom. Custom, in turn, was placed within the realm of the sacred. The office of chief, the status which combined ultimate political and religious legitimacy, was the key social mechanism for guaranteeing compliance with custom and thus the maintenance of social and ecological balance. The chief was (and is), the Tobians say, *in charge* of their island.

Modern Tobian history begins with the arrival of the Germans in western Micronesia in the early years of this century. It was then that the first sustained contact with societies beyond Tobi's reef was achieved. Many changes, the most fundamental of which has been the loss of autonomy, have flowed from that contact. During the troubled course of this difficult process, the traditional religiopolitical solution to the problem of social and ecological balance has been significantly altered.

Tobians are now Christians and their Catholicism is largely orthodox, at least on the surface. The basic reason for their conversion (which occurred *en masse* in the 1930s) was that a series of disasters had convinced them that their aboriginal religion was no longer functional. In another paper I presented an ethnohistorical account of the events of their conversion (1978). In that paper I point out that, despite their orthodoxy, the Tobians have created a kind of metatheology out of some of the remembered sayings and behavior of the priest who converted them. That is, they have created a corpus of teachings which they use to justify their Catholicism. One of the fundamental tenets of that metatheology is that the missionary (a long-dead Jesuit priest named Father Marino) is in charge of them. Their understanding is that he sits on high now, watching over their activities, and will judge them after their death. Since other elements of the corpus are taken as revalidating much of traditional custom, it is evident that what the Tobians have done is to change the basic charter for this religious component of their society while maintaining its essential function intact. The other leg of the traditional mechanism for maintaining balance was, as I have said, political. Here too the Tobians have successfully incorporated externally sponsored change.

Beginning in the 1950s, as part of their desire to "democratize" and "modernize" the Micronesian societies recently captured from the Japanese (who had earlier gotten them from the Germans), American officials of the Trust Territory government decreed the election of Magistrates. This office was meant to replace what was seen as the outdated, arbitrary, and authoritarian traditional status of chief with something more in line with "the modern world." On Tobi, as elsewhere, the initial response to this command was confused and divisive. An analysis of the early elections reveals that no incumbent magistrate was ever reelected. This was primarily due to the fact that incumbent magistrates inevitably had a falling out with the chief (who had often been an early supporter). These difficulties, in turn, flowed with monotonous regularity from the perception that, in urging Trust Territory administrative policy upon the constituency, the magistrate was acting as though he were in charge of the island. It was not until the mid-1960s, with the election of the present

incumbent, that stability was achieved. This man, who has served ever since, managed to escape his predecessors' fate by coming to a *modus vivendi* with the chief.¹⁴ The arrangement they worked out is as follows: The magistrate is in charge of government things such as taxes, censuses, and elections, while the chief is in charge of custom. Further, and drawing on the transitive character of in-charge relations, the chief also holds ultimate veto, even over government-sponsored programs and projects. As Tobians might phrase it, Father Marino is in charge of everyone, in this life and the next, but the chief is in charge of the island's people. He is the only one who can intervene in the behavior of middle-aged men who in turn are directly or indirectly in charge of everyone else. The magistrate, under the chief, is in charge of government (meaning the external administration). The chief, who because of his descent retains a semisacred character, is still the main human actor ensuring compliance with the subsistence and social norms or customs which, in the people's minds, allow them to live together successfully in their tiny and vulnerable society. Under this dispensation they have been able to live a satisfying neo-traditional existence with its clear-cut rhythms and patterns. In Eang, though, the situation is very different.

The Eang settlement came into being during the German administration, with a combination of factors leading to its creation. A severe typhoon had devastated the island of Merir (Tobi was not affected). Palauan society had suffered severe depopulation in the nineteenth century and had not yet recovered. When the Germans brought the survivors from Merir to Koror (which they were developing as a port town), several powerful Palauan leaders made generous and competing offers for what they must have seen as potential reinforcements for their underpopulated villages. After a couple of false starts, the Germans established the Merir people in the outskirts of Koror on some empty lands called Eang on the island of Arkapasang. The local Palauan leadership turned over title to those lands through the Germans to the Merir and other Southwest Island people. Through the years of this century that community has continued to grow, attracting people from all the Southwest Islands.¹⁵

Palauan society is markedly hierarchical. Its numerous clans, as well as its many villages, are all rank ordered. Even within villages, hamlets are ordered, and even within clans, lineages.¹⁶ For various reasons, ethnocentrism being among the most important, Palauans have traditionally ranked Southwest Islanders below even the lowest of Palauan groups. There are many exceptions--open-minded and generous Palauans have brought about many friendships and even a few marriages between the two groups--but in general Tobians and other Southwest Islanders are

looked down upon by Palauans.¹⁷ Lacking economic or political power, then, the Eang community's access to the commercial and administrative institutions of Koror, dominated by Palauans, is fragile. As economic conditions continue to deteriorate in Palau, with ever-increasing unemployment, competition for the unskilled jobs held by Eang people increases. Further, as the Palauan population expands rapidly, pressure on Eang's lands can only increase. Finally, as the Americans pull out of Micronesia, administrative and judicial positions are increasingly being filled by Palauans so that, despite the Eang people's very clear (on paper) title to their land in Eang, it is more and more possible that they will lose their lands. Their response has been to seek a Palauan to be in charge of Eang. I want to relate briefly three incidents from Eang's history to illustrate this and to show why this solution has not, and perhaps cannot, work.¹⁸ The first episode occurred during the 1930s, the second in the early seventies, and the third in the early eighties.

During Japanese times one of the senior Palauan merchants, a man of some economic and political power, took an interest in the Eang community. Although no one ever told me that this person was in charge of Eang, it is clear that he had become a kind of patron of the community. He was, it is said, very kind to Eang people; he hired them whenever he could and tried to "help" them. One day he came to Eang and told some Tobi people that many people in Palau were laughing about them because of some scurrilous rumor which was making the rounds. (It is a measure of Tobian discretion that no one could ever "remember" what the rumor was.) He told the Tobians that there was an even more scandalous story going around about a very well connected Palauan maiden, the daughter of an important chief. She was said to have been seen in her garden by a Korean farm worker, calling out the name of her absent lover while masturbating with a tapioca root. Now, coming up at this time was some sort of festival of native arts, sponsored by the Japanese, to be held in a large field in downtown Koror. When the day dawned, virtually the entire population turned out. Part of the festival was to be a dance competition between different communities. When Eang's turn to dance arrived, out came six Tobian men in women's dress, carrying between them a large coconut-frond basket. With their leader calling out a cadence in Japanese, they marched to the center of the field, where, watched by thousands of Palauans, they set down the basket, began an obscene dance, pulled a large wooden object out of the basket, and called out in unison and in Palauan, "Here is a tapioca!"

According to all accounts, a riot nearly broke out. Only the quick action of police and soldiers prevented the enraged and insulted Palauan

spectators from physically attacking the bewildered and frightened Tobians, who were hustled back to Eang by the Japanese. This is a favorite story among the Tobians to this day. Several of the dancers are still alive and, when asked, are only too happy to relate the tale, complete with dance steps and shout. But when we look past its humorous aspect we can see that it resulted from a serious misreading of Eang's place in Palau and the role of that Palauan businessman. In essence, the Tobians had acted as though they were in a position to publicly sanction a prominent Palauan. People who are in charge of others on Tobi frequently use them in precisely this fashion in order to exert their authority over third parties. And public violations of important norms are often danced about, with the chief's blessing. But that Palauan businessman was not, in any meaningful way, in charge of them, and they had, in fact, no such place in Palauan society.

The second incident involved an election. During the 1970s, the stresses on Micronesian societies increased dramatically. This was certainly true in Palau. Those stresses were reflected in Palauan politics, which took on a vitality and excitement which had been absent during the preceding years of stagnation. During one district-wide election in the early seventies, feelings were running particularly high. Two respected Palauans were competing for the support of the Southwest Islands and Eang. Each represented a different political party, which in turn reflected both old and new fault lines within Palauan society. When the results were announced, it became apparent that virtually the entire Southwest Islands vote (including that from Eang) had gone to one of the men; unfortunately, he had lost the election. The morning after this outcome became public, a canoe appeared on the front lawn of the Royal Palauan Hotel. Whoever had placed it in this most public of locations had accompanied it with a sign which said that the Eang people should sail back to their home islands. Another low point in the relations of Eang to Palauan society had been reached.¹⁹

In discussions with people at this time, when the Eang people were feeling lost and besieged, I learned that they had hoped their candidate would be in charge of them, securing for them access to jobs, schools, and the hospital. Again they had misread the situation. Not only had they chosen a person who could not win (he was badly defeated), but they had had unrealistic expectations for what he would have been able to do for them even if he had won.

The final episode happened more recently. My source of information on it is a Palauan friend active in politics. As part of the constitutional negotiations leading up to the emergence of the Republic of Palau, it was

decided that the old municipalities would become states. I am not in the possession of many details here, but I was told that the High Chief of Koror proposed to incorporate Tobi and the other Southwest Islands within the State of Koror. Apparently there was considerable opposition to this scheme; and, so far as I know, it has joined the proposed Palau Superport in oblivion--at least for now. I can only speculate, but it seems likely to me that some discussions with Southwest Islanders must have preceded the High Chief's public announcement. Perhaps the public proposal, whose defeat did no one any good, could have been avoided if in those discussions the Palauan side could have been brought to see the unacceptability of a suggestion that the chief and Father Marino be replaced by an outsider and. if the Southwest Islanders had been able to communicate precisely what their hopes for an in-charge relationship with a powerful Palauan entailed. The fundamental difficulty remains, however. To my mind, at least, the complexity and diversity of Palauan society render the in-charge complex a massively inappropriate vehicle for the structuring of relations between Southwest Islanders and Palauans.²⁰ To answer why the Tobians remain wedded to this strategy, as well as to answer why they have chosen it on their home island to structure their incorporation of externally sponsored religious and political change, we must ask why they remain wedded to the in-charge complex itself. This is another way of asking why it is that socially and economically powerful Tobian women accept a junior role in in-charge relationships that they dislike. To answer these questions we need to turn to Tobian folk psychology.

Tobian Folk Psychology

In the Tobian view of human nature the only true adults are men between middle age and senility. Only individuals of this class fully possess the prime virtues of self-restraint, competence, and independence. Females and all other males are thought to be capable of exhibiting these characteristics only in varying degrees of approximation. In other words, there is a single model of the good person, of which men of middle age are thought to be the best examples. Everyone else, lacking the two virtues of self-restraint and competence, is deprived of the third: independence. These people have someone placed in charge of them.²¹

Women, children, and young and senile men are all thought to have imperfect impulse control. Therefore it is necessary for the well-being of everyone that people who do have this control be permitted to interfere in their affairs. Stories, songs, and legends tell again and again of the di-

sasters which happen when women, children, or senile men act on their own. These disasters all involve conflict.

Tobians believe--with some reason, in my opinion--that their society rests on a delicate balance of enlightened self-interest and self-restraint. They are keenly aware of all the many serious conflicts which exist. These are conflicts over resources and political office that can and do persist for generations. They also know that associated with these conflicts is a good deal of very negative emotion. Hatred, fear, and jealousy are feelings Tobians experience in themselves and attribute to others. Yet Tobians are also aware that survival on their island depends on mutual cooperation. Complex subsistence activities demand the participation of everybody. In this small society, each person must be able to draw on the labor of everyone else. Each person thus must be willing to help everyone else, even in the face of profound dislike. Furthermore, Tobians value, and are largely successful in achieving, an extremely pleasant tone to their daily interactions. A good-humored pleasantness is a trait in which everyone excels and is the single most important feature in making Tobi the delightful place that it is.

Objectively speaking, it is possible to see that much of the success which the Tobians achieve in their collective creation of a mutually supportive and largely benign society is due to their use of ghosts as mechanisms of displacement. I am quite confident that much of the hatred and fear which are associated with the hidden dispute structure is deflected onto these culturally constituted defense mechanisms. This is the kind of observation toward which traditional psychology and psychological anthropology lead one; and it is probably, as I say, valid as far as it goes. But if we go further and consider the Tobian understanding of these matters, we learn that they attribute their success to self-control. This is an idea very like the notion of the exercise of the will in Western folk psychology. There is a crucial difference between these two psychological models, however. People in the West tend to hold that controlling negative emotions is an act of limited usefulness because such emotions are so powerful that they will eventually be expressed in one way or another. Tobians, on the other hand, believe that a fully mature person can contain bad feelings indefinitely, especially if it is in his (the ethnographically correct pronoun) self-interest.

Tobians consider that the network of disputes which troubles their society is of a single piece--engaging, as it does, everyone in one way or another. Therefore, they fear that the direct expression of any one dispute would bring the entire network into the open, with all its attendant negative emotions. This, they fear, would render their island uninhabitable.

They especially dread the public shaming which the exposure of old wrongs would entail. Intense public shame, they say, leads to ghostliness, and ghostliness to violence. Thus, the creation of in-charge relations makes a kind of inevitable sense to them. Middle-aged men, they believe, are far-sighted enough, intelligent enough, and strong-willed enough to resist socially dangerous impulses. They can see that it is in their best interests to deny those impulses which could wreck both their society and their personhood. Everyone else needs a kind of external controlling agent--that is, someone in charge of them. Only the chief (and certainly not the magistrate) is considered, by virtue of his semisacred character, to have a truly altruistic stance toward the island and its society; and so only the chief has no one (at least no mortal) in charge of him.²¹ Even the adult men, then, have someone who can interfere in their behavior if their self-interest leads them to threaten the social and ecological balance.

As I have said, in-charge relationships make a kind of inevitable sense to Tobians. Starting with what they take to be the givens of human nature and considering the situations in which they find themselves, in-charge relationships are logical outcomes. Whether we are speaking of the Eang community, Tobi island, or powerful middle-aged women, Tobian organization of political behavior is predicated on Tobian understandings of the meaning of personhood. And as long as those understandings persist, people individually and collectively will fit or try to fit themselves into in-charge relationships.²²

Political Culture and Ethnopsychology

The pioneering study of political culture was carried out by Almond and Verba and reported by them in 1963. Drawing on the tradition of national character studies in anthropology (by then largely abandoned), they carried out comparative research on the political cultures of five contemporary democratic nation-states. In this work they defined political culture as "specifically political orientations--attitudes toward the political systems and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system" (1963:12). Thus there are two components which Almond and Verba saw as important in political culture: the political system and the self. In this paper I have focused on the latter. To do this I have drawn on the developing field of ethnopsychology. It is my belief that such an enterprise may offer the field of political culture a way out of certain conceptual difficulties. For, just as anthropological studies of national character have been revitalized within psychological anthropology by replacing standard social science notions of the person with ethnopsychologically

and phenomenologically relativistic or “emic” concepts of the self, so political culture can benefit by contextualizing the self.

In Almond and Verba’s work, and also in the work of those who have followed them, the self is taken to be both a constant and a theoretical primitive. As a concept it seems to owe its characteristics to a combination of Euro-American folk notions of personhood and identity with ideas drawn from the works of Marx, Freud, and G. H. Mead (works which themselves exist in a complex relation of mutual influence with western folk psychology).

Traditional studies of political culture focus on the connection between the self and the political system. The self is taken to be the same in every society, while the political system (naturally) varies. The problem for the analyst is to explain variation in “attitudes,” “values,” and “beliefs”—the connectors of the self to the political system. The explanatory strategy adapted has much in common with an early, no longer viable style of anthropological analysis. Faced with the task of explaining some bit of seemingly bizarre behavior, the analyst asks himself or herself, “What conditions would lead *me* to engage in that behavior?” This is the “if-I-were-a-native” mode of analysis, and it has been largely discredited within anthropology. It seems to me that with their a priori assumption of an essential identity between themselves and the selves of the members of various polities (Japan, Israel, Latin America, Mexico, Massachusetts, the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Italy), political culture theorists are making the same error.²³ They ask, for example, “If I were a Mexican, how would I act in a political system featuring corruption and bureaucracy?”

Rejecting the a priori assumption of uniformity, one is led to attempt an explanation for behavior or beliefs in terms drawn not from the analyst’s experience but from the subject’s. The question becomes, “What is it like to be a Mexican political actor?” In order to answer such questions I think we need to take into consideration indigenous notions of being.

Much of the preceding has been presented in a rather *telegraphic* manner. I have strung together a series of assertions without always supplying adequate substantiation. Since the paper was demonstrative and programmatic in intent, I hope that (whatever the plausibility or lack of it in the various points which I have made) the utility, or at least excitement, which an ethnopsychological perspective can bring to studies of political culture is apparent.

NOTES

1. I spent a total of two and a half years with the Tobi people--six months at the Tobi settlement in Eang near Koror and the rest on the island itself. The first stay was as a Peace Corps volunteer from 1967 to 1968 and the second as a predoctoral researcher from 1972 to 1973. This latter period was financed by an NIMH Grant (UPMS 5 TOI MH 12766). I wish to thank my colleagues (both anthropologists and sociologists) here at George Mason, whose comments have led to many improvements in this paper. The line from Naipaul is from "The Return of Eva Peron" (1981, 66).

2. *Hosuar* has a variety of meanings. For example, English speakers sometimes translate it as "is responsible for" and other times as "owns." The particular translation given it depends on the context in which it appears. When that context is the relations between people, the word is always translated as "(to be) in charge." The semantic connotation of "in charge" is primarily a cultural construct. The system of relations between people which it structures is a social artifact. To avoid confusion I have found it best to call the former the *in-charge symbol* and the latter the *in-charge system*. When I refer to both together (certainly the most ethnographically accurate usage) I use the phrase *in-charge complex*.

3. For a good example of work on the relations between folk psychology and political behavior see Myers (1979). For ethnopsychology see Hallowell (1955), Wallace (1970), and Geertz (1976), who all set the stage for the recent upsurge in interest. Caughey (1977 and 1979) and Lutz (1982a and b) both analyze other Micronesian folk psychologies. For further discussion of Tobian folk psychology see Black 1977 and n.d. b. For an analysis of the folk psychology of Tobian gender relations see Black (1981).

4. Considerable confusion exists about the correct name for the new republic which is emerging out of the old U.S. Trust Territory District of Palau. The latest and most authoritative usage seems to be to keep "Palau" for use in English while replacing it with "Belau" in situations in which the Palauan language is being used. In any case, Tobians call the place "Panug."

5. It is impressive that only in Koror do Tobians meet *strangers*. Within their own society, everyone knows everyone else. In any interaction the older person commands the younger's entire biography, while for the younger person the older is inevitably a significant other, known since birth.

6. This is also true of Sonsorol and Pulo Ana but is not the case with Merir, all of whose people now live in Koror. (At least I think they do. Periodically there are rumors that the Merir-people are going to recolonize their home island.)

7. Tobi's recent demographic history is starkly tragic. In 1910 a German government vessel arrived. A reasonably careful census was taken and nearly 1000 souls were counted (Eilers 1936). Shortly thereafter, perhaps as a result of this very ship's visit, influenza struck and the population was halved and halved again. The population then began a steady decline, only arrested in the mid-sixties. This second, slower decline was due to reproductive failure associated with various pathologies.

8. Among these preparations the most important are arrangements for care of valued possessions (e.g. canoes) and relationships (especially in-charge relationships with spouses and children). At this time also, people introduce more and more Palauan words and phrases into their speech. By the time the ship actually arrives some people are speaking nothing but Palauan. During the visit of the ship almost all of the interactions with outsiders are carried out in Palauan. After the ship leaves, the rate of Palauan usage drops dramatically as people purge their speech and return to "pure" Tobian.

9. Of course, Tobian society is much more complex than this. Residence, marriage, kinship, descent, gender, and age, as well as more temporary interest or work groups, are all important in the organization of social relations. For purposes of exposition only, I have allowed these to remain in the background while focusing on the in-charge system. That system interrelates in a variety of ways with these background features. Some of these ways will become apparent in what follows.

10. The very widespread pattern of early childhood adoption increases the number of such relationships for the child.

11. This is a time during which cross-sex sibling tension is at its greatest. Other points of transition (such as that from middle-aged dominant male to elderly subordinate) are also often times of tension and stress for those involved in them.

12. Furthermore, in-charge relations can be temporary. For example, the sister of a recently deceased man is expected to go into a year's mourning, governed by various prohibitions. So is the widow. Often the sister will be placed in charge of the widow for the duration of the mourning.

13. Typhoons, droughts, fish migrations, destruction of the freshwater lens upon which all life depends, and epidemics are only some of the physical disasters which threaten that balance. Social disruption, ranging from a breakdown in communal cooperation at necessary tasks to outright violence, is also a constant threat to the Tobian adaptation.

14. See my paper "Conflict Morality and Power in a Western Caroline Society" (n.d. a) for a more detailed treatment of this topic. See also McKnight (n.d.).

15. There was until recently a Tobi settlement of two or three families on Malakal Island near the harbor for the Port of Palau.

16. The absence of such ranking of groups is one of the strongest contrasts between Tobian and Palauan society. For the ethnography of Palau see Barnett (1949), Vidich (1949), McKnight (1960), Force (1960), McCutcheon (1981). A very important new work is Smith (1982).

17. Palauan attitudes toward Tobians in the past have swung between patronizing and loathing. There is some evidence that this is beginning to change. In the past a good deal of stereotyping was engaged in by Palauans vis-à-vis Tobians--most of it negative.

18. Second only to the problem of gaining secure access to Palauan institutions, Eang is faced with the necessity of creating stable leadership within the community. Here, too, the in-charge system plays a role, and it is only considerations of space which force me to omit a discussion of this situation.

19. Lest the picture painted here be left unrealistically bleak, I should point out that there have also been high points in the relations between the Southwest Islands and Palau. Most of these involve a Southwest Islander succeeding dramatically in the outside world in a way that Palauans can identify with and take pride in. Such a case was that of a Southwest Islander who served in the Viet Nam War and rose to become a captain and a helicopter pilot before being killed. Married to a Palauan, this man was a hero to both Palauan and Southwest Islanders.

20. Perhaps as a way of organizing relations between individual Tobians and individual Palauans (and maybe even up to the level of the family), such an attempt makes sense. But on the communal level Palauan society is simply too complex and factionalized to permit Tobians as a group to use the in-charge complex to manage their relations with it.

21. It seems to me that Tobians claim an exaggerated fear of the person in charge of them in order to disguise from themselves and others how powerful a social sanction gossip is. This is not the place to develop this notion, but this usage, along with the desire to be thought a "good" person, provides powerful reasons for people to submit themselves to the in-charge system. The primary reason, though, is a general acceptance of the ideology sketched in above.

22. In another paper I raise several questions about the conditions under which folk psychological systems in general and Tobi's in particular might be reasonably expected to change (Black n.d. b).

23. For Germany, Italy, Mexico, Great Britain, and the United States, see Almond and Verba (1963). For Israel see Etzioni and Shapiro (1977). For Latin America see Harris and Alba (1974). For Japan see Richardson (1974), and for Massachusetts see Litt (1965).

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